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NSC FOR ABRAMS

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SUBJECT: NEXT STEPS ON DEMOCRACY IN EGYPT

Classified by DCM Stuart E. Jones for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

1. (S) Summary: After absorbing Washington's clear message on reform, Gamal Mubarak's NDP clique, allied with ministers and advisors, was given unprecedented power over the conduct of the election. The positives of September 7 -- sidelining of the NDP "old guard" and the security forces -- were a direct result of the reformers' influence. The upcoming parliamentary elections pose a greater challenge, particularly given the weakness of the opposition parties and the lack of time. While pressing now for international observers, we should support the vocal constituency of democracy activists by expanding our support for their home-grown monitoring efforts. NDI and IRI are now well-established here and we recommend they send expanded assessment teams for the parliamentary polls. We should receive at high levels Egyptian reformers visiting Washington to support their efforts. We should also consider a high-level U.S. visit to Cairo before the parliamentary elections take place. End summary.

2. (S) The September 7 election brought fundamental changes to democracy in Egypt. Serious flaws remain, but the restrained conduct of the security forces and the transparency epitomized by Ayman Nour's second place finish, show that Mubarak received the unambiguous high level messages from Washington (both private and public) that things must change. Pressing our advantage will entail using the wide range of openings and tools provided by September 7. Septel contains detailed recommendations on how to engage resources such as NDI and IRI and openings such as that provided by the access (late, but now irreversible) afforded to domestic monitors. At a strategic level, we need to exploit the new openness that Mubarak underlined in an address following an NDP meeting after the victory when he said "let us expose ourselves to the outside world with an innovative mind."

3. (S) The economic reformers, who have consolidated their power around Mubarak, achieved new prominence in this election. Minister of Trade Rashid Rashid, Investment Minister Mahmoud Mohieldin, and Finance Minister Youssef Boutros Ghali joined Gamal Mubarak and key members of his NDP clique -- such as steel tycoon Ahmed Ezz and political scientist Mohamed Kamal -- to run every aspect of the election. Their success was reflected by the total sidelining of the NDP's old guard in managing the president's campaign and the fact that the security forces were kept on such a tight leash throughout. Since the outcome was never in doubt, the amount of effort and expense spent on the way "candidate Mubarak" was portrayed reflects the reformers' stamp on this new aspect of Egyptian politics. The Mubarak campaign, which led by example, and ensured, at least on TV, improved media access for the candidates, was a creation of the reformers. We now need to get them to apply the same energy to improving the conduct of the parliamentary elections. Continued support for the reformers as they embark on this task is essential.

4. (S) Realistically, however, we face a far tougher challenge in the parliamentary elections. We lose the advantage of the novelty of the presidential election and return to familiar ground for manipulation by the NDP party apparatus. Individual NDP party hacks will not easily relinquish the power they have built up over decades -- especially when their livelihoods are at stake. The old guard and security apparatus (likely with Mubarak's support) will do everything possible to block Muslim Brotherhood members running as independents from gaining seats. Finally, the political parties arrayed against the NDP are in sad shape. The Wafd, the only party with a national presence, saw the myth that it leads the opposition soundly debunked on September 7. Ayman Nour's Ghad party is too new to have established itself throughout Egypt and it is unclear that it can field competitive candidates -- let alone cross the 23 seat threshold needed to secure a spot in the 2011 presidential election race.

5. (S) We may face our greatest criticism now from Egypt's democracy activists who are lined up against Mubarak. In a sense, the half-way passable performance by Mubarak is the worst of all possible worlds for them. They fear Mubarak may have made just enough concessions to accommodate the West, while maintaining his pre-eminent position. Frustrations

will mount, as will a lack of clear direction, given the paucity of political choice. The urge to incite the security forces may strengthen--particularly in the "Kifaya" movement as it retools its message. However, we must not fuel the opposition activists' ever-present suspicion that the USG will waver in its support for their full democratic rights because of Mubarak's conduct of the presidential polls. The most effective way to address the errors in the conduct of the election may be provided by the emboldened domestic observers' movement, with the possibility this time that international observers can join them. Our support (including financial support) will be critical as the monitors build on the precedent established in the September 7 polls and prepare for the parliamentary elections. We will back the activists through the difficult days ahead through direct advocacy, public diplomacy and organizational activities that emphasize their positive role on the process.

16. (S) NDI and IRI are now firmly established in Egypt and through a variety of programs can continue to influence the situation here. In the near term we see two tracks. The first should be to press the GOE to allow full international monitoring for the parliamentary elections. The second, building on the September 7 precedent, should be to provide funding and encouragement to IRI and NDI to send larger-scale assessment teams to monitor the parliamentary elections. The EU needs to be moved from the sidelines into a more active role. Now that we have the precedent of foreign assessment teams operating in Egypt without credentials, the EU should send teams for the November and December balloting.

17. (S) Mubarak's focus on prosperity and job creation in the campaign suggests there will be more reformers in his new Cabinet. Minister of Trade Rashid has launched a full-court press on the FTA. Public support for his efforts will strengthen the reform ministers as the "old guard" reassesses its position in the wake of September 7. The last redoubt of the latter group is the back room politics of electoral districts, party lists, and Shura (advisory) council seats. The old guard's strongest card is the sovereignty/interference argument that they deploy against statements from Washington on how Egypt should run its democracy. We can counter this tactic with a carefully calibrated balance of public support and private pressure. Specifically, we should continue to support members of the Gamal Mubarak reform group when they come to Washington through high-level meetings throughout the Administration and public statements in support of their role in Egyptian society. Privately, we need to continue to underscore to senior GOE officials that the U.S. and the broader international community will be paying very close attention to the transparency of the parliamentary elections process. We also propose, now that the September 7 elections have passed without major upset, that a senior visitor, such as Deputy Secretary Zoellick, consider visiting Cairo before the Parliamentary campaigns begin in late October to reinforce this message.

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